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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE A.A.L.

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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians  
(Section of the Library Association)

EDITOR: D. HARRISON  
Central Library, Manchester 2.

VOL. 52. NO. 7

JULY, 1959

## THE INHERITORS

### *The Presidential Address to the A.A.L. of E. F. Ferry, F.L.A.*

The preparation of an address is always a trial, and the preparation of a presidential address assumes the proportions of a nightmare. A cursory glance round our profession seems to reveal little original upon which to comment, and in any case, far better brains than mine have made their various pronouncements in the past and will no doubt continue to do so in the future.

One of the main difficulties, therefore, is finding a subject, and in this I was helped in rather an oblique way by a liking for church music. As a member of a choir, I suppose I have sat through as many sermons as most and, nearly always, there has been a text upon which the sermon has been constructed. It therefore occurred to me that I might do worse than to follow this ecclesiastical example, and I found that I had a ready made text to hand, one which I read last July during the twenty-first birthday celebrations of my own Division. It formed part of an inspiring message sent on that occasion by one of our wisest and most far-seeing presidents, F. A. Sharr, and I quote it without permission, but with considerable gratitude. It goes—"In my experience it is not the meek who inherit the earth, but the younger generation. If they are going to enter into their inheritance, enjoy it and make something of it, they must remain alert, alive, enthusiastic and constructively critical."

I suppose that the theological purist could protest that there is blasphemy in the statement, but there is too much truth to bother about dogmatic niceties. The very essence of the A.A.L. is to remain alert, alive, enthusiastic and constructively critical, and this it has done during the sixty-four years of its existence. We have only to look back at the names which have graced our Association to realise that complacency has rarely, if ever, been allowed to enter into our affairs at officer level. The holding of office, particularly in the case of secretaries and editors, seems to breed what might be described as a strong form of orthodox and fearless non-conformity which persists long after the holders have passed to higher office or position. However, these are probably exceptional people, thrust into the very forefront of professional conflict, and therefore tougher than the rest of us. It is they who, perforce, bring the Association's policy out into the open and do battle on its behalf. In most cases they have come up through the ranks, although some have burst upon the scene with a crash that belies the light weight of years behind them.

However, it is not the professional commandos with whom I am concerned at the moment. There was a saying during the war that for every fighter pilot in the air, there were ten ground staff who had put him there. It is very much the same in the present context, although the characters shot down by our advance guard are much less dangerous. An immense amount of work devolves upon honorary officers, whether at Divisional or National level, but each officer must rely upon his committee and those who are not yet committee members for support, encouragement and, indeed, inspiration. Ideally and democratically, one would expect the officers to be almost receptacles and passers-on of ideas propounded by the membership at large and put forward in the proper manner by committee or council members, but this is not always so. A lot of time has been saved as a result of a motion to "leave it in the hands of the officers," in many cases a sensible suggestion. I sometimes wonder, however, whether this suggestion is indicative of complacency, blind faith or sheer laziness. It is difficult to say, and there is occasionally a feeling that the Association is not always pulling its full weight. There are, of course, many matters which can be dealt with most effectively in small committees, but democracy demands that the voice of the whole membership should be represented, and this brings me back to my text. During the past few months, and for many months to come, vital matters have arisen and will arise which affect all of us. I will not dwell upon the APT II award, except to say that there is only one way in which we can remedy matters, and that is through the agency of N.A.L.G.O., acting upon the advice of the Library Association. We have our duty to our professional association, but N.A.L.G.O. is the body which fights for improved conditions of service. Its hand must be strengthened by weight of numbers, and I have little patience with the somewhat cynical attitude of those who readily accept benefits obtained for them by an association of which they are not even members.

But this is something of an aside. There are other things to concern us. The ultimate effect of the findings of the Roberts Committee, for instance, cannot at this moment be foreseen, but any results are almost bound to have a far-reaching effect upon the working lives of all of us, and particularly those who are beginning their careers in librarianship. The recommended change of status of county libraries, to give but one example, could revitalize one of the younger branches of librarianship should the divorce from subordination to Directors of Education come about. There are benevolent Directors of Education under whom some of us are more than content to work, just as there are despotic Town Clerks and Borough Treasurers who can make a librarian's life one of hardship and frustration. There are small authorities which work efficiently, and those whose library service is a pathetic misrepresentation of the real thing—and we would be foolish to close our eyes to larger authorities whose ponderous efforts to justify their assumption of authority fall far behind the level of efficiency which we and other rate-payers rightly expect to find. Before this year is out, you will probably have had your fill of the report, but I would like to mention the very thorough treatment which it received at our Folkestone conference a few weeks ago. It was not the main topic, of course, but it pervaded the entire discussion and generated expressions of opinion which were sane, balanced and constructive. The "old guard" who were there must have come away assured that if the body of members present represented the future leaders of the profession, then there is little to worry about—and



the younger members probably astonished themselves by their fluency of ideas and speech. Such a conference is the epitome of all I have in mind about the future of the profession. This meeting together of assistants from all kinds of libraries, and the contact of mind with mind in debate and discussion are not only stimulating—they are part of a solid basis for future development.

One feature of the conference which impressed me as much as any was the sensible approach to the purpose of librarianship. There was a noticeable absence of that frightful tone of condescension so often heard when assistants refer to their readers as "borrowers" (an ugly term in itself) and a much more realistic and balanced approach to the provision of light fiction on the one hand and erudition on the other. Not that there was any meek acquiescence in the idea that the library is there solely to entertain; the days are gone, we hope, when it was regarded by so many as a purveyor of nonsense for those whose mental abilities were open to doubt. We have only to look at the incredible growth of further education, of higher technological education and of the universities themselves to realise that the breed of intelligent enquiring readers which has always existed has now grown beyond belief. Not all use public libraries. A few may be entirely satisfied by their own private facilities, others may rely entirely upon special libraries and some are probably unaware of the help which we can give. The first two classes are probably beyond our reach, but the third class calls for an active public relations policy—an evangelical approach, to quote one of the speakers at Folkestone. Allied to this third class is a fourth, which consists of those who, disappointed in their local provision, are frankly sceptical of the abilities of public libraries to help them. It is upon these two that we must concentrate our attention.

The various statistics given in the appendices to the Roberts report give us some idea of what we are up against in many areas, and not all of the blame can be laid upon the control of county libraries by their education committees, or the tenacity of small authorities who cling to their independence.

Now, I am not suggesting that any of us can individually redress a grievous state of affairs, but of this I am certain: before any measures can be passed by Parliament in an effort to improve the public library service of this country, there will be violent opposition—from Directors of Education who are unwilling to see parts of their empires slipping away, from the local authority member whose local pride and yearning for the power which he fondly imagines autonomy can give him, will fight grimly to retain it, and from those powerful Associations who, regardless of reason, will fight for their members who, rightly or wrongly, they consider to be subjugated to autocratic rule. Any Public Libraries Bill is unlikely to raise strong political passions, but its passage may depend very much upon the attitude of senior civil servants on the one hand and upon the successful lobbying of Members of Parliament by librarians and others who are concerned for the future of the library service on the other. I imagine that there will be debates and arguments from the publishing of the Roberts Committee Report to the presentation of a Bill—and in these we may rightly join. Indeed, we would be failing in our duty if we did not do so.

At the moment, I firmly believe that the reputation of the A.A.L. stands as high as ever it has done in the eyes of the Library Association, and its representatives on the senior council can be assured of a hearing

—I would venture to suggest a respectful hearing. The important point here is that these people *are* representatives of the general membership, and I would like to think that this amicable feeling at top level is carried down to the Branches and Divisions and so, by a circuitous route we double back to the individual. It may be many years before an opportunity arises again for us to exert an influence upon our chosen profession as a whole, and in these days when honorary secretaries are searching for new and vital topics for discussion, or for fresh approaches to old topics, it is surely criminal to waste this golden opportunity. I do not suggest that the Roberts report itself should be discussed ad nauseam—it should have due attention, but enough is as good as a feast. The implications of the report for standards of service, staffing, professional education, etc., are there to be mulled over. There will be many irresponsible statements made. Irrelevancies will no doubt try the patience of chairmen. Motions will be tabled which may not be worth the paper they are written on—but what matter? It is far better to have a lot of dross out of which to extract gold, and, if those whom I am privileged to know up and down the country are true to form, there will be far more valuable comments and constructive motions forwarded for higher consideration, whether it be through Branch or Divisional machinery. We have inherited much—a professional organization playing an even more powerful part in our education and welfare. We have inherited a Library Association which is beginning to show itself open to change. We have inherited a library structure which was built upon the ideas of some fine and far-seeing men. We have also been lumbered with some frightful examples of culture for the masses, if I may use the phrase. We are inheritors, and it is up to us in turn to build up an heritage for those who will be fighting our battles for us twenty years hence.

Much of what I have said depends for action upon an informed membership and one which has passed or is passing through the mill of professional education. It is not my intention to pursue this particular topic, but it seems to be a necessary aside. From its inception, the A.A.L. has been closely connected with the formal side of professional education. From its ranks have come writers of standard text-books—Berwick Sayers, Henry Sharp, Howard Phillips and E. V. Corbett, to name only a few. Its correspondence courses are probably the best known of its ventures in this field, but we must not forget revision schools and courses held at national and divisional level, and the active participation of its members on joint consultative committees and other bodies with even more frightening names. Mention of its authors calls for a word or two upon one of the A.A.L.'s most valuable adjuncts—its publishing programme which, run virtually on a shoe-string, has excited admiration and, perhaps, envy from our parent body and, probably, other sections. What the A.A.L. has *not* done is to adopt a dog-in-the-manger attitude towards other forms of tuition, in spite of occasional criticism to the contrary. While providing an alternative, we see clearly that the only really effective method of education is through a full-time school. In presenting this alternative, we do not hold any brief for the unnecessary retention of the second best—we merely provide facilities until the ideal can be achieved. The informal aspect of the A.A.L.'s attempts to educate its members rests on the number of meetings held up and down the country, and in its annual conferences. The variety of subjects dealt with at these meetings is not always as wide as one would wish, but there does appear to be a growing influx of bibliographical and literary in addition to the more mundane topics. The

A.A.L. and its Divisions should really counterbalance the L.A. and its Branches in this respect. The latter, as I see it, should be more concerned with policy, and the former with practice.

Formally and informally, then, the Association has always striven to educate assistants towards examination success and that fuller professional life which transforms the meek into those who will inherit and improve upon that which has gone before. There can never be a perfect library service, whether public, special or university. Scientific and technical progress will always present the carrot to the librarian who is searching for a new idea or gimmick, and the very nature of our financial support, whether it be from public or private funds, will allow us to go so far and no further along the road to Utopia—but this does not mean that we must be satisfied with our lot, because it may, in comparison with the best, be an unhappy one. Whatever we feel, however we may rise in wrath to condemn working conditions, examination syllabuses and the rest, there is one thing we must never lose sight of, and that is this: there is nothing more vulnerable or ill-mannered than uninformed criticism, and it is this we must guard against if we are to carry on the work of our predecessors. There have been iconoclasts in our ranks for many years, but they are rarely successful unless they have something to put in the place of the fallen idols. That way lies anarchy, and no anarchist was ever successful in forming a government, even a revolutionary government. To put it at its lowest level, criticism of the Library Association and the weight attached to professional qualifications by the totally unqualified and uninterested assistant is just so much hot air. Guard against complacency, criticise and argue, but make sure you are working from a sound premise.

Just as society in general is based upon an hierarchy of its members in accordance with their abilities, so an Association depends for its

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present health and further continuance upon the activity and watchfulness of *its members*. If the A.A.L. is to continue its good work, then, it must be at the hands of an enthusiastic and educated younger generation. It was built by the efforts of those who did not count their "nights on" so much as their "night off," and who still found time to lay the foundations and first storeys of the structure. We know it was a smaller Association, and that counter-attractions in the form of an expanded examination syllabus did not exist, but this does not detract from the efforts of the pioneers. Now, each year, some of the longer-serving members of the Association retire from the field for a variety of reasons—new posts, flagging energy, fading away as retired officers, or sheer exhaustion. One thing is certain. The turnover of officers at national and local level may not be as great or as disastrous as the turnover of staff in a library service, but it is just as inevitable and, one would imagine just as difficult, bearing in mind that the duties are honorary—I make reservations on this, because, to the best of my knowledge there has never been any difficulty in filling these posts, even that of honorary secretary! We have, indeed, been fortunate in the apparently inexhaustible reservoir of talent which we have been able to tap, and although the early loss of such people as Moon, Pocklington, Bill Smith and Davinson, to mention only a few, has been a blow, it has not been a fatal one, and in this lies the strength of any Association. From what I have seen of the present Council and of Divisions in various parts of the country, there seems little to worry about, provided a sense of balance is maintained in all respects. One of the more regular complaints made by chiefs of all types of libraries is a lack of what might be called "middle-strata" assistants—those who have left behind the junior stage, are wholly or partly through Registration, but are not yet ripe for senior responsibility—in general terms, assistants in the early and middle twenties. This lacuna is going to cause serious trouble in the library profession and, just as it is a bad state of affairs in any library, so it can be equally bad in an Association such as ours. We escape the worst consequences, of course, because each Divisional committee is, as it were, the spearhead of the profession within its own particular area, but the ideal is a balance between those with years of experience who are content to sit on the side-benches and advise, those who are capable of holding office and leading discussion, and those who are, in effect, serving an apprenticeship.

It is gratifying to find such a state of affairs prevalent in Divisions and on the Council. I suppose that our method of divisional representation is responsible for this to a certain extent, and certainly the practice of providing elective places for the "under thirties" has paid dividends. This latter policy was deliberately aimed at recruiting to the Council those who fully deserve a place but, through no fault of their own, or by a misplaced sense of modesty felt that they stood little chance against better-known names. The correctness of the policy will, we hope, be proved when these people begin to challenge in the "over thirty" group. However, this latter policy and divisional representation points to the fact that our membership could cut right across the profession, particularly as far as age groups are concerned, but I have one spot of unease. It is a matter of some regret that special and university librarians are represented by such a numerically insignificant proportion. If we are to regard librarianship as a complete and entire profession, then this state of affairs is bad, and it is difficult to see the reason why. Dis-

counting such unique establishments as the House of Commons Library and a few university libraries which completely disregard Library Association qualifications, surely the rest of us share a common heritage and a common path of effort to qualifications. In the immediate post-war years, there was a strong tide flowing towards government and special libraries, which carried with it some very good A.A.L. men and women. Almost abruptly, their A.A.L. activities ceased, a fact which could be put down to pressure of work in organizing or reorganizing their various libraries—but they stayed away long after the main burden of that work had been accomplished. Many, of course, went as chief librarians and probably relinquished A.A.L. work on principle, but one would have imagined that they might have taken with them their A.A.L. sympathies, using their influence to draw their fellows into line and to introduce their juniors to our Association. Such an influence could have gone far towards cementing the profession, but any evidence of its exertion has been negligible. Better salaries and, in some cases, improved working conditions continue to attract local government officers (although a recent survey points to the regrettable fact that the poorer specialist libraries seem to be even worse than the poorer public libraries). This is not a plea to assistants to remain in local government—far from it. If you know of a better 'ole then go to it, and good luck to you—it may even strengthen our hand in future negotiations. What I do ask is that migrants should take with them their A.A.L. affiliations, and keep them active. As far as the present situation is concerned, we, in the A.A.L., should ask ourselves two questions. Have we failed to sustain interest, or does the translation to a different type of library service bring about a complete metamorphosis? There have been few members of the A.A.L. council who are not municipal or county library assistants, although the A.A.L., as far as its power goes, speaks for all types of library. The university libraries are completely unrepresented in the elective field, and have been so for far too long. I cannot speak for the position in all Divisions, but I feel that things cannot be very much better. I know full well that some of our text-books are written by extremely capable librarians from outside the public fields, and that occasional articles in the *Assistant Librarian* come from special sources, but the evidence of the existence of such people only serves to aggravate the situation by emphasising the magnitude of such talent and its absence in our practical affairs. Now, this is all wrong. If the L.A. council can have its representatives from outside the local government field, then there would appear to be no valid reason why the A.A.L. should not do likewise. Quite apart from the potentially valuable contribution which might be made there is also the very important point that the A.A.L. council is a good training ground for the senior council. It is the rule rather than the exception for newcomers to either council to sit and observe for several meetings before rising to speak—a feature which is quite understandable when policies and rules of procedure have to be mastered. Those who have moved to the L.A. council after an apprenticeship in the A.A.L. rarely exhibit this reticence, and this is not all due solely to a natural aptitude for speaking on every possible occasion. Size may have an intimidating effect, but the vociferous and forceful contributions to our debates and discussions made by members of the County Libraries Section point to the parallel that members of other sections could do likewise. Fortunately, our proceedings do not coincide with W. S. Gilbert's gloomy picture of Parliament—"the prospect of a lot of dull M.P.'s in close proximity, all thinking for themselves,

is what no man can face with equanimity." Goodness knows, a lot of assistants think for themselves, and express themselves freely, but we look for the leaven of our fellows in the "other" libraries. I know full well the arguments against the chances of specialists in the national field, but very few seem prepared to take their chance in open election, and fewer, probably, estimate correctly the sympathy and support which they would receive.

It has been said that the L.A. has too many Branches and Sections. Indeed, the L.A. council itself is enquiring into this very matter. If the number of Sections breeds a form of insularity which precludes contact between library assistants, then the enquiry would seem to be justified, but if the more prescribed sections can combine their own particular interests with participation in wider fields of librarianship as a whole, then any proposed reorganization may meet with considerable opposition. We, in the A.A.L., need the specialist's viewpoint, and it is our conceit that activity in the A.A.L. may put off that hardening of the mental arteries which seems to be an occupational disease of those whose professional lives are spent in a rather narrower circle than most.

We have inherited an Association which has been built up over the years by assistants from all walks of professional life, and I make a plea that the future should be built on a similar basis. As far as our libraries are concerned, the heritage is very much on the lines of the curate's egg. There are good and bad authorities, there are those whose idea of co-operation begins and ends with half-hearted participation in regional schemes, and whose doors are either firmly closed to all but the duly accredited or are open to "extra-boundary" readers only upon a greasing of the authority's palm in the form of subscriptions. This is a sad state of affairs. Knowledge is universal, and should be universally and freely available. For an authority to boast that its volumes have penetrated the Iron Curtain, but to deny free access to its library to a person living a few yards on the other side of the town boundary seems a little unreal, to put it charitably. Some of us may never be in a position to do much about this, but the Roberts Committee has knocked tentatively at the door in this respect, and I fervently hope that the day is not too far distant when the library service will, in fact, fully endorse the motto of the Library Association—*Ingenia hominum res publica*.

There are many good things in librarianship, but nothing is perfect, nor can it ever be. The good things only serve to point the way to further improvement, and, to return to my text, "if we are going to enter into our inheritance, enjoy it, and make something of it, we must remain alert, alive, enthusiastic and constructively critical." The past is beyond recall, but the present and the future are ours. It behoves us to take our heritage, examine and probe, and build for those generations who are to come.

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## The Examination System

*Mr. Munford comments on Mr. Stokes's criticism of our examination system which was a reply to a previous letter from Mr. Munford ("Assistant Librarian," May, 1959).*

Mr. Stokes overwhelms me with information and courtesies. He encourages me to comment on:—

(a) The shortcomings of the syllabus and examinations, particularly in classification and cataloguing and in work with children. As I have never claimed more than the most superficial understanding of the former and as practically all of my readers now are even older than me, I pass this over, *enthusiastically*.

(b) The shortcomings of my fellow examiners. I pass this over, *defensively*.

(c) The level of examiners' fees. "Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon." I pass this over, *altruistically*.

(d) Traffic conditions on the Great North Road. I have strong views about this, even allowing for the recent improvements in Huntingdonshire. All of them are, alas, quite irrelevant. A coachman, I believe, however, seldom relied on *one* pair of horses. Is there a moral here? I pass this over *reluctantly*.

(e) The obviously highly involved and contradictory nature of "examination tricks." As I at least am no Wittgenstein, I pass this over, Mr. Stokes, *kindly and courteously*.

(f) "Embalmed practice." I, too, have been a library Egyptologist and am familiar with most of the curses. I pass this over, *fearfully*.

Now, seriously, just what am I left with? Very little, I think, on which a practising examiner can freely comment. It is a pleasant exaggeration to insist that our syllabus is "supremely out of touch with current librarianship." Any syllabus is likely to be chronically out of touch with the fringes of its subjects. I am all for reducing the "out of touchness" to a minimum, provided that the contrasted need for reasonable stability over periods of several years is also given full consideration. But on this whole subject, as with others, the occupation of keeping up with the Jonahs, at least metaphorically, appeals, I am sure, as little to Mr. Stokes as it does to me.

W. A. MUNFORD, *Director-General, National Library for the Blind.*

## Support for the Syllabus

Mr. Stokes's reply to Mr. Munford calls for some comment; so many people criticise L.A. exams. these days, and one wonders whether the real complaint is their own inability to pass or to get their students through.

I am particularly disturbed that Mr. Stokes should feel that classification and cataloguing are of decreasing importance, although I agree that much nonsense is written concerning these subjects (witness the offerings of Messrs. Vickery and Farradane in the *Journal of Documentation*, which seem to have transported a comparatively simple and highly intelligible theory evolved by Dr. Ranganathan to the realms of higher mathematics). Without decrying B.N.B. cards, which are of the excellent



standard expected of everything from that admirable organisation, Mr. Stokes seems to have overlooked the fact that these are of very limited value in special libraries, where the classification problems are immense. Even in public libraries these cards do not transform themselves into a public catalogue overnight—some organisation is called for. And are there any public libraries which do not frequently acquire material not listed in B.N.B.?—if so, it's time they ceased to function. The difficulties of a practical test in cataloguing and classification are obvious, but Group A (iii) does at least give students a chance to show whether they are capable of practising this "unimportant technique." That so many are not is a sad reflection on them and their tutors rather than a fault of the examination.

While agreeing with Mr. Stokes on the neglect of documentary reproduction, I must cross swords with him concerning bibliography. At Final level, book production forms a very minor part of the syllabus; I passed this part last year at the second attempt, and found the examination both interesting and stimulating—in fact I enjoyed studying for this almost as much as I enjoyed doing classification and cataloguing. I did not attend full-time library school, but I did have the benefit of one of the A.A.L.'s excellent revision courses under the skilful guidance of Dr. Walford.

Most librarians will agree with Mr. Stokes on the subject of English Literature, but I am less sure about his remarks concerning work with young people. Surely this is something which cannot be tested by examination—either one has the knack of being able to deal with children or one hasn't. The essential qualification of a children's librarian should be the "basic core," the whole of which is equally applicable to children as to adults, *plus* this gift of getting on with children.

K. G. B. BAKEWELL, *English Electric Co. Ltd.*

## **Facts not Words**

The recent correspondence resulting from Alan Bill's article on display serves to emphasise yet again how much of our so-called professional knowledge is really just personal opinion, unsupported by fact.

Mr. Bill does not believe in "topical" displays; Mr. Howes thinks they stimulate interest in our stocks. Mr. Bill disapproves of displaying book-jackets; Miss Blackwell regards them as "Visual Aids" to readers. Mr. Bill thinks the "general reader" (name any ONE using your library) knows what he wants; Mr. Clark thinks he doesn't. And so on. Everybody *thinks*, but nobody *knows*.

Isn't it about time we had some genuine research into readers' attitudes towards books, libraries, displays and the rest? Isn't this the sort of thing the L.A.'s Library Research Committee should tackle? Before anyone rushes into print to inform me that the L.A. is at present considering the Pilot Readership Survey carried out by the South-West Branch of the L.A., may I point out that I did say "*genuine research*"? I have no wish to deprecate the amount of work put into this survey, but unfortunately it was carried out in such a haphazard manner—particularly in the choice of samples—as to make the results virtually useless. If this represents the best librarians can do, the job should be given to the experienced social research workers if it is decided to carry out a national survey. But whoever does the work, let's have more facts and less speculation.

J. S. PARKER, *West Riding County Library.*



## ***A Trade Union — another suggestion***

Mr. Coveney's letter in the May issue puts forward one alternative to NALGO as a trade union. Admirable as it may be, I cannot imagine that A.A.L. members working in libraries other than public libraries would take kindly to the A.A.L. becoming a trade union.

There is another alternative which commends itself to chartered librarians with whom I have discussed the matter, members of S.M.C.C.L. among them. That is an "Association of Professional Local Government Officers" registered as a trade union. Whatever its title, such an association would command more respect from the employers as representative of qualified professional opinion in local government. I believe the idea would also receive considerable support from qualified colleagues in other branches of local government—planners, architects, surveyors.

K. CARTER, *Deputy County Librarian, Herefordshire.*

## ***Professional Meetings***

### **A junior assistant from North Wales writes :**

I was, as a junior library assistant, interested but horrified to read Miss M. E. Harrison's views on professional meetings (*Assistant Librarian—May*).

The North Wales Division of the A.A.L., to which I proudly belong, is one of the smallest divisions of the Association. Although it is inconvenient for us to meet on Sundays, our Wednesday meetings are extremely well attended by public (county and municipal) and university staff.

Students in librarianship who are interested in meeting other staff at such meetings (and who isn't, or shouldn't be?), can always attend during their free time or apply for time off; and most librarians are only too pleased to grant it to them, if possible.

The average students interested in library work, and studying for examinations, will find that these meetings will complement their work and study, enabling them to take a broader view of the library world.

I don't think Miss Harrison realises that attendance at these professional affairs form as great a part in the "making" of a librarian, as the examinations themselves.

CAROLE P. MARSTON, *Colwyn Bay Public Library.*

### **East Anglia agrees.**

Although I agree with Miss Harrison that study, by correspondence *does* occupy much so called "spare time," and that it is essential to keep abreast of happenings outside the field of librarianship, I also feel attendance at professional meetings should be encouraged.

At the recent Eastern division week-end which incorporated a course for Registration students, it was evident to all who attended from public, county and special libraries, that much was to be gained from discussion. Many of those present were engaged in correspondence courses. Discussion helps to solve problems which cannot be answered from textbooks. These meetings open up new fields and enable librarians to realise there *are* other systems apart from their own.

DAPHNE G. WINTER, *Norfolk County Library.*

### **Cry from the Backwoods.**

Neither the editor, when complaining of low attendances at professional meetings held on Sundays, nor his correspondent, in her reply, made any mention of the difficulties of Sunday travel.

A one day school on public speaking was organised by the Yorkshire Division of the A.A.L. fairly recently. The meeting was held on a Sunday and attendance was generally considered quite good. This in spite of particularly vile weather. However, a colleague in Bradford was prevented from attending

(and she wanted to attend) by the fact that on Sundays there is only one bus from the district where she lives to the town centre. Similarly, at the last committee meeting of the Yorkshire Division, the possibility of holding a meeting on Sunday in Sheffield was dismissed because of poor train services on that day.

DAVID SMITH, *Bradford Public Libraries*.

*Though vastly experienced in the art of travelling to Sheffield on Sundays, we have no space for an analysis of timetables.*—ED.

### Study Material for Students

As a supplement to the article by Julian Isaacs in the April *Assistant Librarian*, may I make a few more suggestions of free material available to students of Reg. Group B?

The Bowater Paper Corporation publishes a glossy 40-page booklet: *Paper: the story of an industry*, which is a good elementary account of paper making. Their occasional periodical *The Bowater Papers* seems to have "rested" after No. 3 (1954).

Loose insets in the *British Printer* provide examples of different types of paper and illustration processes.

Intertype Ltd. issue a brochure which explains the Fotosetter very clearly. R. Riley and Co., Huddersfield, will send an illustrated pamphlet describing the processes of library bookbinding, although the illustrations are rather old-fashioned.

Finally, if in print again, the catalogue of the permanent printing exhibition at the "Printers' Devil" in Fetter Lane, E.C.4, and published by Whitbread and Co., provides interesting illustrations and excellent short histories of printing and book illustration. It might even tempt you to try a post-budget pint there.\*

R. H. MILLWARD, *Croydon Public Library*.

\*We understand that the catalogue is still o/p. No harm in the post-budget pint, though.—ED.

### Talking Points

**The Lolita Affair, Part Two**, is the title of a remarkable document published by the French firm, the Olympia Press, of which Mr. R. L. Collinson has kindly shown us a copy and which is summarised in the *Bookseller* for May 9th. The Olympia Press published in 1955 the English version of *Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabukov, which was subsequently banned by the French Minister of the Interior. In contrast, the recent edition in French by Editions Gallimard has aroused no official comment, and the book is a best seller in the United States. The Olympia Press are naturally aggrieved and are claiming 20 million francs damages.

Meanwhile apart from any copies which the Customs have missed, *Lolita* remains for Britain a book to be talked over, argued about—but not read! Nevertheless, according to the Olympia Press, it has already played havoc with Mr. Nicholson's (of Weidenfeld & Nicholson) political career and proved the supremacy in Britain of the ideals of Mr. John Gordon of the *Sunday Express*! One thing is certain; if ever an English edition appears, the fact that it was once banned will bring it more readers than its intrinsic merits. The Olympia Press, while naturally praising the book, admits this to be the case with regard to its present success in other countries.

**One in thirty** is the proportion of "habitual readers" discovered by Kenneth Allsop (*Spectator*, April 24th) in what he admits to be a somewhat "unscientific" personally conducted survey of reading habits. What exactly constitutes an "habitual reader" he does not closely define, and

the examples he gives are probably the worst, none the less this account is essential light reading for all librarians interested in the idea of finding out about their potential public.

**We welcome "Link,"** Newsletter of the Bristol and District Division of the A.A.L., the first issue of which has appeared as Spring, 1959. The increasing coverage of Divisions by local news sheets is an encouraging sign of professional enthusiasm at local level.

### ***Book Charging Investigation***

In our "Talking Point" on Book Charging Methods (April issue), we find we were misinformed as to the exact nature of the investigating team from the Manchester College of Technology, which is a combination of librarians and "the outside expert." Mr. Frank Hogg, Lecturer at the Manchester School of Librarianship contributes the following account of the way in which this investigation is to take place.

#### **THE SURVEY.**

Many charging systems and their variations are in use or have been tried in this country, but so far a scientific survey of them has not been carried out. In the main, where comparisons have been made between one system and another, the method has been empirical. The present survey is intended to make an objective comparison of the systems and to try to relate each to the "traffic" to which it is best suited.

A proposal for such an investigation was placed before the Library Research Committee of the Library Association, and subsequently the Library Association Council gave its official support.

The survey will now be carried out by the staff of the Manchester College of Science and Technology. In this College, Work Study and Librarianship are sections of the same Department of Industrial Administration; an arrangement unique in this country, if not in the world, and one which enables Work Study specialists and professional librarians to work together as colleagues.

Mr. T. E. A. Verity, M.S.Tech., A.M.I.E.E., M.B.I.M., Head of the Work Study Section, in association with myself, will be personally responsible for carrying out the survey, but we shall be able to call on our colleagues in either section for specialised help, advice and knowledge.

Systems which will be examined in this country will include: Bookmatic, Browne, Photo-charging, Punched cards, Token and Selective Token. Some regard will be paid to systems in operation in the U.S.A., and here the team have been fortunate in enlisting the aid of Mr. J. C. Harrison, who will be spending the summer as Visiting Lecturer in Librarianship, at the University of Illinois.

This survey will not be confined to charging systems used in Public Libraries, for where possible the needs of Special and University Libraries will also be considered.

#### **THE OUTSIDE EXPERT.**

In the investigation of an established procedure, the "outside expert" is at a disadvantage in that he lacks not only the detailed everyday knowledge that the professional has, but also the much more subtle feeling of the "background" against which the activity is carried on. He would be the first to agree that this knowledge is of vital importance in any investigation. However, familiarity carries its own disadvantages because the "professional" may not in all cases question what has habitually been accepted as a matter of course. Neither is he in a position to make detailed and detached comparisons outside his own field. Furthermore, his colleagues will frequently suspect the professional of bias in favour of his own method.

The ideal team then appears to be a combination of the "inside man" (the professional), with his detailed knowledge and the "outside expert," with his experience of similar investigations in other fields.

It is hoped that an unbiased and objective report will result, though whether a panacea for all our ills in all conditions will be found remains to be seen!

## A Summer Day in Nottingham

The 1959 Annual General Meeting rather reminds one of the story about the man who missed the summer in England, as he was indoors having a cup of tea. The whole thing was over so quickly that the Hon. Assistant Secretary hardly had time to get out his pen to take some notes, before it was time to put it away again.

One hundred and five members gathered in the Police Assembly Hall. After Councillor G. M. Reed had welcomed the Association to Nottingham on behalf of the Nottingham Public Libraries Committee, the President took the opportunity of introducing to members some of the Hon. Officers who are often heard of but seldom seen away from their home Divisions. One of the editors of *Liaison*, well known in certain A.A.L. circles, was also present.

The minutes of the previous meeting could hardly be expected to cause much excitement. They didn't, and the proposal from the chair of their acceptance as read was greeted with an enthusiastic silence which was taken to signify assent.

There followed the Annual Report, the opportunity for members of the Association to shoot at the Council, or for Council members to indulge in a little public airing of private feuds. Although Mr. Tomlinson went through the Report paragraph by paragraph to make target sighting easier, the silence remained unbroken—until he came to the one beginning "1958 was a quiet year." At last there was an interruption, but not from the floor. Clanging bells, clattering feet and sirens reminded us that we were meeting next to the Fire Station, and one felt that only a strong sense of duty prevented some of the young in heart from dashing to the windows. After that burst of excitement, the Annual Reports of the Council and of the Hon. Treasurer were approved with the usual well mannered murmurs of agreement.

In formally handing over the office and regalia of President to Mr. Ferry, Mr. Tomlinson pointed out that the Association was disproving the adage of the prophet being without honour in his own country. The A.G.M. was being held at Nottingham to honour Mr. Ferry in his own Division, and the abilities which had served the Association for so long, especially in the field of professional education, well suited him for that honour. After thanking Mr. Tomlinson for his glowing words of praise, the only item of business left for Mr. Ferry to deal with was the election of the Hon. Auditors, both of whom were returned unopposed. There were no motions to discuss, no other business, and so ended what must be one of the quickest A.G.M.'s on record.

After an interval for the Officers to leave the platform, Mr. Ferry gave his Presidential Address. This appears in this issue of the *Assistant Librarian*, so that it is sufficient here to say that it amply supplied the stimulation and interest that had been lacking in the business meeting, and those who travelled to hear it were well rewarded indeed.

ROY OXLEY.

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# SOUND THE ALARM

*Council Notes — 14th May, 1959*

On the last occasion that the Council ventured out of London—to Newcastle in 1956—the train not unnaturally caught fire. Nottingham was determined that there should be no conflagration of Council on this occasion, and just to make certain we were placed in the Police Assembly Hall immediately over the fire-station. Lulled by a resultant feeling of security, and also by a good lunch and a warm sun, members settled down to a good-natured though business-like meeting.

Only one matter arose from the minutes: the question of sanctions against "blacklegs." Council was reminded of advice previously given by the Honorary Solicitors regarding both the rules of the A.A.L. and the bye-laws of the L.A., and it was clear that the Association should rely in the future as in the past upon bringing moral pressure to bear upon the culprits, rather than seeking the powers of compulsion.

The item to cause the most concern in the report of the Press and Publications Committee was the imminent publication of *Elements of Library Classification* by Ranganathan, and the question of how far the contents would be outdated by the publication of the 16th edition of Dewey's *Decimal Classification*, since it quotes examples from the 14th edition. Mr. C. W. Taylor rose to his feet and the fire-alarm promptly sounded. He claimed to have read the manuscript both in English and the original Indian, and he suggested that each member of the Publications Committee should also read it before publishing. Members of this committee, to whom possibly the book was Greek, seemed unenthusiastic, and Mr. Harold Smith came to their defence by explaining that the examples quoted are incidental to the main theories of the book, but that to clarify the position it would include a prefatory note explaining that it is a theoretical and philosophical approach to classification, and in no way an examination textbook.

The Education Committee had been considering the views of Divisions upon the running of National Residential Revision Schools, since there has been considerable concern about the best method of organising these so that they will be of benefit to as many members as possible without running at too great a loss. A possibility to be explored further is that of running such a school in conjunction with one of the Library Schools.

The Policy Committee had before it the views of Divisional Committees upon the best way of limiting the powers of institutional members of the Library Association. The majority opinion was in favour of excluding them from voting on the business of the Annual General Meeting by limiting the right to vote to those with pre-professional or professional qualifications. However, there are so many related matters to be taken into consideration that no formal motion will be presented to the L.A. at this stage.

Another matter on the agenda of this committee was a motion from the Yorkshire Division urging Council to press for a speedy implementation of the Roberts Committee Report. This motion was "received." The Yorkshire trio—Mr. Ashmore, Mr. Phillips, and Mr. C. W. Taylor—regarded this as tantamount to its rejection, and demanded an explanation. However, when Council learnt of the actions already being undertaken by the Library Association on this matter, it was agreed that although members approved the spirit of the Yorkshire motion, there was no immediate need for the A.A.L. to prod the L.A. into action.

After the reports of the Committees came the reports of Divisional representatives on action taken locally to protest to NALGO on the A.P.T. II Award. Although complete figures are not known for the numbers signing the petition, it was clear that it had commanded a large measure of support. Many branches of NALGO had also been persuaded to pass appropriate resolutions, though, as was to be expected, there was also bitter opposition in some quarters to any form of action. In a number of branches where willing support was given to

resolutions, it was felt that petitioning was a less orthodox method, and rather than lose the goodwill which had already been gained in these cases, representatives had used their discretion in not pressing for signatures. The picture which emerged from these reports made it clear that A.A.L. action had achieved its main objects of making non-librarians in NALGO fully aware of our grievance, and of creating a large measure of support in bringing pressure to bear for new negotiations. NALGO cannot ignore this pressure, and if the L.A. fails now to sell its case it will not be due to any lack of support from the A.A.L.

A further proposal brought forward by the Yorkshire Division was that some of their members should distribute leaflets to all delegates attending the NALGO Conference at Scarborough in June urging them to support the motion of Nottingham and Solihull on library gradings. This idea was welcomed by Council, and its financial support was assured.

The main business of the afternoon being dealt with, we turned to a report on the Folkestone Conference. This was given by Roy Oxley, who gained the laugh of the afternoon when he explained that the absence of a bar, and the difficulties of sharing bedrooms, had been overcome to everyone's satisfaction. The President paid a well-deserved tribute to all those who helped to make the Conference such a success.

On to next year's Conference, and an invitation from the North Wales Division to go to Bangor from April 1st to 3rd was gladly accepted. There followed a brief report on the Annual General Meeting which had been held on the previous evening, and then came news of the decisions of the Library Association Committees from our representatives.

Before the Council meeting started the President had decided if possible to bring it to a close by 5 p.m. so that members could catch their trains. As he expressed our thanks to Nottingham for generous hospitality and thus concluded the meeting, the time was—strangely enough—5 p.m. That is the way to conduct a meeting.

JOHN H. JONES.

## A.A.L. CORRESPONDENCE COURSES.

### REVISION COURSES, SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER, 1959.

A limited number of *Registration* and *Final* courses will be available for the session September—December. These short period courses are reserved exclusively for those students who have already sat the examination in the subjects required.

The closing date for application is *25th August*: it must be emphasised that after this date no application will be considered. *Overseas students are ineligible.*

### FULL LENGTH COURSES.

Application for *F.P.E.*, *Registration*, and *Final* courses beginning Autumn, 1959, must be completed and returned by *30th September*. Full particulars of the courses offered are given in the current edition of the *Student's Handbook*.

### FORMS, FEES AND ENQUIRIES.

Application for forms must be accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes and should be sent to the A.A.L. Hon. Education and Sales Officer, Mr. J. S. Davey, F.L.A., 49, Halstead Gardens, Winchmore Hill, London, N.21. The fee for each course, both revision and full length, is £3 10s. 0d. Students outside Europe taking full length courses are charged 10s. extra for each course.

"**Cheap Wallpaper?**" asks a correspondent on seeing a B.N.B. entry for April 22nd: "G.B. road atlas of Great Britain: 6 inches to 1 mile. London, G. Philip, 7s. 6d." Sounds generous enough!

**Mr. Davey**, Hon. Sales and Education Officer, reports a recent order for a copy of "*A Primer of Classic Fiction* by Phillips."

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